

CLAIMS

We claim:

1. A computerized method of representing at least one characteristic of a design element on a visual design surface, the method comprising:

- (a) representing an element with a shape on a visual design surface;
- (b) determining a value of at least one characteristic of the element;
- (c) associating the at least one characteristic with an aura; and
- (d) displaying the aura in association with the shape on the design surface.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the aura comprises a color coded area surrounding the shape.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein the aura comprises a color coded area adjacent to at least a portion of the shape.

4. The method of claim 1, further including:

- (e) repeating (a)-(d) for a plurality of elements; and
- (f) merging auras associated with at least some elements in close proximity and having the same value of the characteristic.

5. The method of claim 1, further including:

- (e) repeating (a)-(d) for a plurality of elements; and
- (f) sorting the elements so that elements having the same characteristic are generally located in the same region.

6. The method of claim 5, further including grouping and displaying elements in affinity regions, wherein each affinity region represents elements having the same value of the characteristic.

7. The method of claim 6, further including providing a label for at least one affinity region that allows a user to change the value of the characteristic of all of the elements in the at least one affinity region by changing the label.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein the at least one characteristic comprises a use for the element.

9. The method of claim 1, wherein the at least one characteristic comprises an identification of a namespace.

10. The method of claim 1, wherein the at least one characteristic comprises an identification of an application layer.

11. The method of claim 1, wherein the at least one characteristic comprises an identification of an importance level.

12. The method of claim 1, further including:

- (e) determining a value of at least a second characteristic of the element;
- (f) associating the second characteristic with a second aura; and
- (g) displaying the second aura in association with the shape on the design surface.

13. The method of claim 12, further including:

- (h) determining a value of at least a third characteristic of the element;

- (i) associating the third characteristic with a third aura; and
- (j) displaying the third aura in association with the shape on the design surface.

14. In a computer system having a graphical user interface including a display and a user interface selection device, a method of changing at least one characteristic of an element displayed on a visual design surface, the method comprising:

(a) displaying on the display at least two affinity regions on a visual design surface, wherein each affinity region includes elements having the same value of a characteristic;

(b) receiving a movement command indicative of the user interface selection device dragging an element from a first affinity region and hovering the element over a second affinity region; and

(c) in response to (b), changing a value of the characteristic of the element in (b) from the value associated with the first affinity region to the value associated with the second affinity region.

15. The method of claim 14, wherein the characteristic of the element in (b) comprises a use for the element.

16. The method of claim 14, wherein the characteristic of the element in (b) comprises an identification of a namespace.

17. The method of claim 14, wherein the characteristic of the element in (b) comprises an identification of an application layer.

18. The method of claim 14, wherein the characteristic of the element in (b) comprises an identification of an importance level.

19. A computer-readable medium containing computer-executable instructions for performing the steps comprising:

- (a) displaying on a visual design surface a design element shape; and
- (b) displaying on the visual design surface an aura in proximity to the design element shape to represent a value of a characteristic.

20. The computer-readable medium of claim 19, wherein (b) comprises displaying the aura around the design element shape.